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FOR KIDS ONLY:

what you should know about marijuana

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Marijuana

What Is It?

Marijuana is a powerful mind-changing drug. It comes from a plant called *Cannabis sativa* which grows in many parts of the world. A marijuana cigarette or joint is made from dried parts of the plant (except for the main stem and roots).

What's It Like To Smoke Marijuana?

The word "high" is often used to describe the feelings caused by marijuana. This really means that the marijuana user feels different, not his or

her normal self. After smoking marijuana, some people become giddy and laugh about things that they would not usually find funny. Others talk a lot or become very quiet. Thinking takes longer and time seems to slow down.

When people use marijuana for the first time, their reactions are not always the same. Some may have no reaction to it at all; others might get sick to their stomach. Some feel strange and become scared of the feelings marijuana causes.

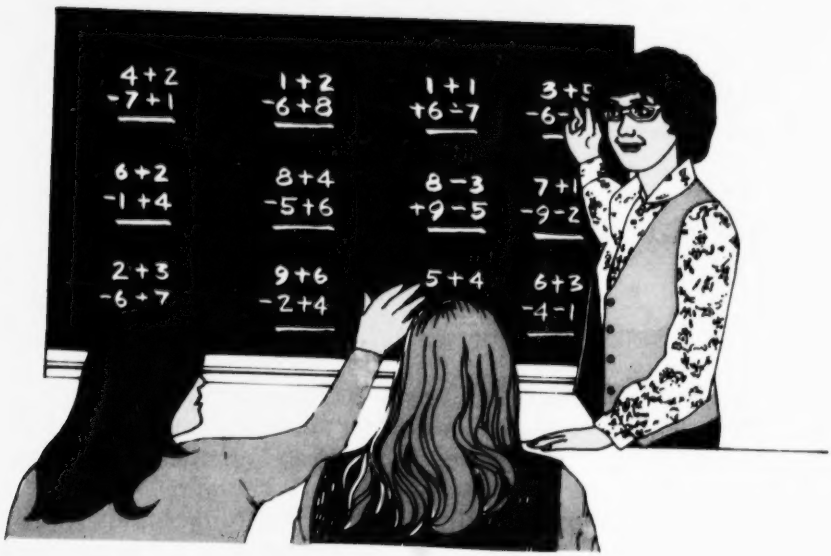
What Causes the High?

The cannabis plant has over 400 different chemicals. The high is caused by the chemical called delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol or THC for short. THC is a psychoactive or mind-changing drug. The more THC in marijuana, the stronger the high will be and the longer it will last.

The amount of THC in marijuana is not always the same because the flowers, leaves, and leaf stems contain different amounts. Even the weather and the soil can affect how much THC will be in marijuana.

What Is Hashish?

Hashish also comes from the *Cannabis sativa* plant. It is a dark green or brown gum-like substance that comes from the plant's flowers. The strength of hashish, like marijuana, is determined by the amount of THC it contains. Hashish is sometimes stronger than marijuana.



What Is a Burnout?

Burnouts are people who, after smoking marijuana heavily over a long period of time, have become dull and slow moving. Sometimes they don't know where they are and are unable even to have a conversation with a friend. Doctors don't know yet whether a burnout can return to normal and, if so, how long it takes.

Does Marijuana Affect Learning?

Yes. Marijuana makes learning more difficult. Concentration is harder, and thinking slows down.

Some students say they like to go to class or do their homework after using marijuana because the work seems easier. But studies show that marijuana actually interferes with thinking. Reading, speaking, and doing arithmetic are especially more difficult.

What Does "Dependence" Mean?

Drug dependence is the need for a drug in order to feel good or normal. Dependence happens when the body becomes so used to having a certain chemical or drug that the body feels uncomfortable, and sometimes even sick, when it is taken away. People may start using a drug that causes dependence because they like it and keep on taking it because it is too hard to stop.

Can Marijuana Cause Dependence?

Evidence shows that marijuana probably does cause dependence. More and more cases are being reported of people who are having trouble reducing the amount of marijuana they smoke or stopping it altogether. Both physical and psychological dependency problems are being reported.

What Is Tolerance and Do You Get It From Marijuana?

Tolerance means that a person's body gets used to a drug and needs more of it after a while to get the effect a smaller amount once gave. A tolerance for marijuana can definitely develop.

Does Marijuana Affect the Way a Person Thinks and Acts?

Yes. Memory can be affected. While high, users will often forget something that happened minutes earlier. Also, the ability to concentrate, learn, and react is slowed down.

What About Driving a Car?

Many studies have been done on marijuana and driving. Most show that thinking and timing are delayed. Marijuana smokers don't respond quickly. This happens even hours after the high is gone. Drivers who use marijuana have the greatest trouble with unexpected events, such as a child running out from between parked cars or a car suddenly approaching from a side street. The marijuana smoker might not react fast enough to prevent an accident.

What Does Decriminalization Mean?

Decriminalization is a confusing word. It means changing the punishment for the possession of small amounts of marijuana, an illegal drug, from a prison sentence to a fine. Some States have decriminalized marijuana, and the fine usually ranges from about $100 to $250. Certain States and communities also require a person who has been caught with small amounts of marijuana to take classes about drugs and their effects. When a person is found with marijuana more than once, the punishment usually gets tougher.

Decriminalization does not mean that marijuana is legal—selling marijuana continues to be a felony (serious crime) in all States and is punishable by prison.

Marijuana's Effects on the Body

How Long Does Marijuana Stay in the Body After It Is Smoked?

Special tests can find marijuana's ingredients in the body up to a month after use. The amounts present depend on the strength and number of marijuana cigarettes smoked. A full month of not smoking is necessary in order to completely rid the body of marijuana.

Does Marijuana Affect Young People Differently From Grownups?

Yes. Young people are still growing sexually, physically, and mentally. Because marijuana interferes with all of these important areas of development, scientists are concerned that young people who smoke marijuana a lot may have problems in growing up to become physically and emotionally healthy adults.

Does Marijuana Affect Boys and Girls Differently?

Yes. Because boys and girls have different reproductive systems and hormones, marijuana affects them in different ways.

BOYS

When marijuana is smoked, the amount of testosterone, a sex hormone in boys and men, is often lowered. Marijuana also reduces the number of sperm produced in the body.

GIRLS

Sex hormones in girls and women are also affected after smoking marijuana. This can affect the menstrual cycle. If a young woman is pregnant, she should definitely not smoke because the THC in marijuana may be harmful to her baby.

Can Marijuana Cause Brain Damage?

It is a real possibility. When marijuana is smoked, its mind-changing ingredient, THC, reaches the brain. Scientists are now trying to learn what kind of damage this may cause in brain cells.

Does Marijuana Affect the Heart?

Marijuana makes the heart beat up to 50 percent faster than the normal heartbeat. It can also cause chest pains in people with heart problems. For these reasons, doctors recommend that those with heart conditions not smoke marijuana.

What Does Marijuana Do to the Lungs?

Inhaling any kind of smoke into the lungs over a long period of time can be harmful. This is particularly true of marijuana because it is usually inhaled deeply into the lungs and held there for as long as possible. Scientists believe that, like tobacco, marijuana will someday be shown to cause many diseases of the lungs, including cancer.

What About Cancer?

Marijuana smoke has more cancer-causing ingredients than tobacco smoke. When the tars from marijuana smoke are put on the skin of animals, tumors grow. Laboratory experiments with human lungs find that abnormal cells develop. As with tobacco smoking, the more a person smokes, the greater the chance of developing serious lung diseases.

Isn't Marijuana Sometimes Used as a Medicine?

Marijuana is not generally used as a medicine. However, its ingredient THC is being tested as a treatment for uncontrollable vomiting and for an eye disease called glaucoma. In special studies, THC, and sometimes specially made marijuana cigarettes, are given to patients who have these problems. If the results of these studies show that THC is effective for treating these conditions, it might someday become a prescription drug.

If Marijuana Is Used as a Medicine, Isn't It Safe?

No, marijuana is not safe. It is a drug, and drugs, by their very nature, change a person's body chemistry. No drug is absolutely safe and all drugs involve some risk. When a person is young and healthy, there is no reason to take risks with his or her body.

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